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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the profession of information brokerage through a look at types of services provided, and through a discussion of major issues, including that of fee for service. The types of information broker and free-lance librarian services are identified: (1) non-profit reference and research services administered by public libraries and educational institutions: (2) large for-profit reference organizations which provide a variety of information services, such as the gathering, organization, packaging, and dissemination of information: (3) major for-profit businesses which produce such information products as indexes and current awareness packages: and (4) services provided by the individual free-lance librarian. Current developments in each of these catagories are traced with reference to representative information consulting services and organizations. Issues viewed as holding major importance in this profession include the ethics of fee-for-service and consequent ramifications on development of pay libraries, the attitude of some librarians toward professional support for the new breed of information worker, and the concept of professionalism as it pertains to free-lance librarians. An extensive bibliography concludes the report. (SW)

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Information Brokers/Free-Lance Librarians: An Alternative Reference Service

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December, 1979

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Delineating the information industry is like battling a hydra, the introduction of a new aspect of the information profession, increases the labor of taming the beast. The information broker or free-lance librarian is one of the newest limbs on the hydra. There are no clear cut definitions of free-lance librarianship. The common definition is, a person who is self-employed and in private practice, while providing reference services or other information needs for a fee [1]. The titles, information broker, free-lance librarian, or information specialist are not satisfactory, even to those who subscribe to them. This is a significant point. The lack of a crisp delineation provided by a recognized and suitable professional title is sympotatic of the vague perception of the free-lance information worker. other factions of the information industry. The situation is evident in several issues currently under debate. The following are of particular concern and examined in this paper: the ethics of fee-for-service and the ramifications it has on development of pay libraries; the attitude of some librarians concerning professional support for the new breed of information worker; and finally, the concept of professionalism as it pertains to free-lance librarians [2]. These issues are generating much literature. The first section of this paper discusses the kinds of services provided by free-lance librarian and information broker, and the second section concerns the issue of fee for service.

Four types of information services are described in this paper. The field of free-lance librarianship and information brokering is vast and expanding daily. The four types are chosen to ease comprehension of the complex issues discussed here. They are: the

non-profit reference and research services administrated by public libraries and educational institutions; the large for-profit reference services which provide a variety of information services - the gathering, organization, packaging, and dissemination of information to suit their clientele; major for-profit business which produce information products like indexes and current awareness packages; and the individual free-lance librarian, who may work with a partner, or hire additional workers as needed, and who either free-lance on a part-time or on full-time bases. Briefly included are the information specialists who are employed by human interest organizations.

Librarians have provided information for as long as organized societies have existed. As mankind passed from one era to another, information needs evolved and became more complex. Librarianship entered a significant phase of it's history during the industrial revolution. Automation of the printing press signaled the start of the flood of documents which librarians and archivists sought to gather, sort, organize, and redistribute. Even the introduction of a now common place machine, the typewriter, increased the mass of documents and messages under the superintendence of the librarian. Technology contributed to this rapid expansion of data and information by introducing spectacular inventions like the computer and non-print media. Archives and later, the public library, were assailed with materials and growing demands on staff and collections by the public. Continuing education programs further agitated the conflict between those who saw libraries as sanctioned warehouses for scholarship, and those who demanded public service, bibliographic instruction, and

increased access to library collections [3].

The demand for information by the public has risen with the increased awareness of it's political and economic potential. The perceived need for timely information and it's fast delivery to facilitate decision-making, furnishes an avenue for unique shared experiences between the librarian and client. As this synergistic education precedes, the supply and demand situation for specialized or customed tailored information packages developes.

From the 1940's through the 1960's was a period of transition for the free-lance librarian and information broker. Over the last ten years, the realization of a market for the free-lance information worker has blossomed; this industry still grows. Specific factors which contributed to this industry were low wages, personal frustrations with red tape, and a lack of professional recognition notably by those employed in academic libraries. Recent library school graduates, practicing librarians, and retired information workers comprise the bulk of the free-lance work force. Two additional reasons people say that they entered into this occupation was it's intellectual challange and the potential for creativity [4].

Characteristics of the free-lance information worker are hard to sketch since they are as diverse a group as is the information industry itself. The list of desirable professional skills is long. A few essential ones are, good communication and management skills, all librarian skills plus statistics, sampling, and public relations abilities. Personal traits which are common for free-lance librarians are, a tough hide, tirelessness, a good sense of humor, ability to listen, patience, political savy, aggressiveness, flexibility, a

business sense, faith in one's own judgement, optimism, attention to detail, and a supportive family and friends. Creative problem solving is common since there is no body of procedures or standards of operation; a lot of unnecessary on-the-job training occurs. All free-lance workers agree, small business administration should be studied.

A major challange of free-lance work, identified by Linda W. Corman, coordinator of RISE, is how to know when to stop the search. Though leaving no stone unturned maybe an attitude common among librarians, it is rarely affordable in the marketplace of public service. Along with economic restrictions the pressure to limit the search "is intensified by the demands of a contract service" [5]. Here, the process of question negotation becomes a fundamental skill to assure that an understanding between librarian and client exists before the contract is signed.

The for-profit reference companies, as they are today, began in 1947 in Chicago, when the Research Information Service (RIS) was "established to make resources of the library accessable to business and industry" [6]. John Crerar was the moving force behind the creaton of RIS. It was initially financed by the contributions from business and industry, who saw a need for the propósed type of service. It was open to the public and offered it's services for free. Originally, RIS was a three year demonstration project. The start-up cost was $60,000. It began operating on January 1, 1947. The services included literature searches, special reports, abstracts of science and technical publicatons, and a translation service. They advertised for customers, though they had a core of patrons. RIS met

with great success. It became appearant that their staff could not handle the growing demand for service. First they expanded the staff, but realized that the only way to meet the demand for special research projects was to introduce, on September 30, 1948, a fee for service. The justification for the charge was to preserve the free service program while allowing the special services to continue [7]. RIS was successful and still operates today.

The current breed of non-profit reference services first appeared in the late sixties and early seventies. Some examples are, Research Information Services for Education (RISE), INFORM, and Information Exchange Center [8]. These services are designed to meet the growing demand for information. They stress outreach services and encourage the client to become familiar with all library services. In addition, often mini courses are taught on search strategy [9]. The staff seems to be motivated by a high sense of duty not the profit motive. However, they also support the idea that "there is no such thing as a free lunch," [10] and believe that providing this kind of information service will enhance the image of the librarian in the eyes of the patron and bring needed funds in to the library.

RISE was created early in the seventies by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, to support their graduate education program and scholarly research in education [11]. They also were eager to serve patrons outside of the academic community. The library at the Ontario Institute had been packaging information for faculty, students, and select individuals prior to instituting RISE. The demand for literature searches taxed the library staff and the collection. Additional complications rose with cut backs in staff and

an outspoken desire by the patrons for more "digested" material. To satisfy the patron and remain solvent, the Institute created RISE. The fee was a way to deter unnecessary and costly bibliographic searches, and it allowed the library staff to return to the functions for which they were hired. The RISE staff consisted of a coordinator, two librarians, a secretary, and a library assistant. Their primary objective was to provide service to those who did not have the time or the skills to research a topic. On the occasions when the staff required outside consultants or additional help, part-time librarians or others were hired. The fee was reaonable; it covered salaries and overhead, but did not generate a profit for the Institute. Originally, the fee was $12.00 an hour. Later, it was raised to $35.00 an hour. At that time there was anxiety about the reactions which might follow such a cost jump, but to everyone's surprise the usual response was, Why only $35.00 and not $50.00, or, "surprised you waited so long" [12]. This was clear evidence that people will pay for information, and that many have come to understand its value and worth of the information worker. The future of RISE looks bright. They want to expand their contracts with other institutions who need this kind of service; and to develop on-line capabilities and an SDI service [13].

Another example of a non-profit reference service is INFORM, created through the cooperative efforts of four libraries in the Minneapolis area - University of Minnesota, St.Paul Public Library, Minneapolis Public Library, and James J.Hill Library. INFORM was opened to the public in 1968. A survey was taken of the business community by the Chamber of Commerce and a $1,000 donation was

solicited from individual businesses to launch INFORM. By 1974, Minneapolis Public Library was carrying 90% of the work load but still receiving only $3.00 back from every $18.00 per hour it charged. It broke away from the other three libraries and began to operate INFORM as an inhouse department. The other libraries continued with their cooperative effort and still support INFORM. As an arm of the Minneapolis Public Library, INFORM expanded and eventually moved into an office of it's own. They remained affiliated with the parent institution.

INFORM provides a wide range of services and has successfully won several municipal contracts. They are indispensable to many businessmen and local government officials, who have grown to appreciate the value of information and trained library professionals. Due to the political savy of Mrs.Elizabeth Frisbie, Head of Special Services Department, INFORM has become a non-partisan political force in Minneapolis, ensuring continued support from all segments of the community. Their philosophy is, "...the library's responsibility to do everything possible to make maximium access possible to public information..." [15] This policy has lead to the upgrading of other public libraries in the area.

This is an example of the positive impact the free-lance librarian has on the public library system. There is no reason to think that this situation is unique, or that such an arrangement is detramental to the health of the public library system. Most free-lance librarians speak or lobby for the public library. In fact, most want to bolster the image of the public library, increase it's funding, and improve collections [16]. However, some sectors of the

information industry suggest that the pay-library is a necessary path if the information industry is to meet future information needs of society. A spokesman for this point of view is Eugene Garfield, director and founder of Institute for Scientific Information. Richard De Gennaro critisizes Garfield's contention,

> Well, libraries were here first giving away information before there was any question that it might be profitable to sell it. No one disputes Garfield's right to sell information, but it is hard for librarians to understand why they should not be permitted to "compete" with him, and why tax support for libraries should be withdrawn in favor, perhaps, of subsidies for the private sector [17].

Finally, in the non-profit sector, information workers are also employed by organizations or associations; for example, Ruth Ann Barrett, Director of Information and Research for the Association of Junior Leagues. She does research for the junior league staff and attends to the information needs of the association members. Her staff consists of one full-time and one part-time librarian, and a research assistant. Most of her work is conducted over the telephone. Her need for current information is not met by most printed sources. Barrett's stance as an advocate is an essential part of her job. Her opinion is that the librarian is a vital and influential force vis-a-vis the quality of life; and knowledge transfer effects the value structure of society in general. This stance is reflected in DeWeese's definition of a professional. His hypothesis is that the librarian must take ethical stands, assert their values as a

professional on general social issues, and risk conflict - if they do not, in other words, they will continue to row the boat while others navigate. He further states that,

> They (librarians) are an indespensible element in the creation, preservation, and loss of knowledge and values. With the increasing explosion of knowledge, librarians are more and more becoming in the position of high priests of society. They have an obligation and responsiblity to speak out on the values society should have [18].

Finally, the views of the librarian should be an accurate reflection of society, though not without some conflict [19].

There is a plethora of large for-profit reference or specialized information companies. One of the largest and most successful is FIND/SVP. Andrew P.Garvin, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, who sees FIND/SVP as a information clearinghouse says,

> We are the link between all the information that is available and those who need it....They ask the question; our job is to know where information is located and to find the answers-as quickly and economically as possible [20].

Indeed, this is a suitable answer for any information broker. FIND/SVP provides a host of services like SDI, Current Awareness, market research, literature searches, and so on [21].

Still another type of for-profit information service is the information company like Institute for Scientific Information based in Philadelphia, Eugene Garfield Director. Mr. Garfield does not

consider himself a librarian. Initially, ISI served an academic, research oriented clientele. However, ISI soon expanded and began publishing the index, Current Contents: Life Sciences (1957+). Over the years, additional indexes have been developed some are, Currents Abstracts for Chemistry/Index Chemicus (1961+), Science Citation Index (1964+), and Arts and Humanities (1978+). ISI also produces tailor made information packages. [22]

ISI has about four hundred employees ranging from high school students to retired librarians. It is a place where many of younger workers gain experience then go on to start their own information brokering firms. ISI supports and encourages this activity [23].

The small independent information brokers or free-lance librarians are the primary focus of the fee for service issue. These information specialists work anywere from just a few hours to sixty hours a week. Their clientele is much the same as the other two types of information services discussed above. An example of an independent is Susan Klement who established Information Resources in Toronto, Canada [24]. The free-lance workers are unique in the following ways: they are self-employed and in private practice fulfilling a principle tenet of professionalism; [25] they have demonstrated their conviction, dedication, and professionalism by attempting to establish a code of ethics or standards; they are attempting to raise the awareness of the general public vis-a-vis information; and, have proposed university level study relevant to information brokering [26].

Now that the basic types of free-lance librarians or information brokers have been identified, how do they find clients? As in any

facet of the business world, visibility along with marketable skills are keys to success. There are mixed opinions on the virtues and effectiveness of advertising. The small companies or individuals tend to rely on word of mouth, which seems to work very well [27]. The larger companies advertise in popular magazines, trade journals, by direct mail, or on the radio [28]. The Yellow Pages is another form of advertising commonly used. Still another form of advertising is the professional directory; there are several, though a number have been published only once [29]. An example is Who Knows What, assembled by Susan Klement in 1976, as part of a project for the Metrolitian Toronto Library Board. The directory was presented at a special program called "Skills Bazzar", at the Ontario Librarian Association conference in October of that year [30].

In general, the free-lance information workers have arrived at their vocation from several related disciplines, yet seem to share a general dissatisfaction with traditionally oriented libraries, due to the lack of intellectual challenge, low pay, bureaucratic intanglement and little or no professional recognition. As free-lance librarians, they research, gather, analyze, package, and disseminate information; they are also concerned with their activities as an educational process and how it effects the attitudes of their clientele. There is an increasing awareness of the effect information has on the quality of life.

But all is not well between librarians and free-lance information professionals. The tension between the two revolves around the current status of the free-lance librarian as a member of the profession and the professional standards they espouse. A key issue

is how to measure the value of information service.

While professionalism is intangible, fee for service is concrete. According to the free-lance information workers themselves, fees are charged for service not for information. They state unanimously that they will not engage in industrial spying, gather proprietary information, or any material that is not in the public domain [32]. The debate over fee for service or pay-libraries shows no sign of quick resolution, though the nature of the problem may have arisen out of misunderstanding. This issue can be approched in a managable and rational fashion. There are two fundamental issues here: one, is it ethical to charge for information gathered at or available free from the public library, and two, if a charge is to be levied how is the value established. In short, how is the values for information derived. Regardless of how information should be assessed, it is apparent that many people, especially businessmen and financiers, believe that the cost of a product or service is a measure of it's intrinsic worth. How does one reconcile wanting to be paid a given wage for gathering and disseminating information with the notion that information has relative value.

The answers to these questions can be considered, however, before answers are attempted, a theoretical framework is mandatory. Placing a dollars and cents value on information is a cumbersome and unsatisfactory process. It is done usually to facilitate a systems analysis or some other process of costing out a product, service, or employee productivity. Elusive and erratic as establishing the intrinsic value of information, no easier is the objective of fixing a relative worth of information. The contractual relationship between

the information worker and the client ensures the quality of service and the librarian a living wage, professional respect, and intellectual challenge.

Before one can determine a system or structure of evaluation of information, if that is what is needed, one must know what constitutes information and how information is generated. Before proceeding further it is necessary to define what we mean by information. Here it is taken to be:

> There are two common interpretations of the term "information" and both must be taken into account:
>
> 1. Information as a commodity: In this sense, information is the physical representation of events and states in the environment, structured so as to be intelligible to some user or group of users. There representations are data packaged in media, which assumes the identity of "information goods." This type of information is a public good (commodity) subject to marketing and logistical concepts.
>
> 2. Information as a process: In this context, information is a process whereby data are received and interpreted by an intelligent being, who transforms the data in light of his existing view of the world, thus leading to a change in the receiver, who is then "informed." In this sense, information is synonymous with knowledge, in that the receiver is knowledgeable about his as well as other states,

preceding as well as existing as part of his own [33].

Information appears to be expanding in a geometric fashion with no sign of abatement. Raw data tends to acquire meaning when someone defines a need or asks a question. The value of that information will vary according to what purpose it is put.

To charge a client by her ability to pay, by the type of information gathered, or by the value of this information to the patron, is a complex matter. Not only would it be impossible to contract for service, and satisfy the client's requirement to know how much the service will cost, but it would take a computer to arrive at a fair charge, if at all possible! If your client has the savy to turn some information he paid $150.00 for into $100,000 that is his reward. The concern of the information worker is that she receive a suitable wage for her services. The answer to the question of how do we evaluate information, in this situation, is that we do not. Instead, we design a price or cost structure for the labor and special services.

Is it ethical to charge a fee for information gathered at the public library? The answer must be yes or we will undermine the very principles for the public library in our society. The main difference between the free-lance librarian and the public librarian is their employer. They are both acting in a professional capacity. Unless the free-lance librarian monopolizes the services and resources of the public librarian or the library, there need be no complaint; the free-lance information worker is a legitimate member of the general public. Do the other professionals who use the library to make their

living get charged a fee? Often they are consultants and sell the information to others. To define the types of users and charge some of them stiffles the spirit of free access to information, a pillor of our free society. To generalize on the relationship between the ethics of the librarian charging a fee for service and the professionals sense of civic duty, i.e., the attitude that any self-employed librarian or information specialist is threatening the ethical standards of the librarianship, is debunked by Ille-Mai Gerdels, who writes,

> The major objection to a librarian's being in business, in a consulting or any other capacity, seems to stem from a feeling somehow it is unethical, and that one's professional purity is sullied beyond reclaim by that root of all evil-money....If we accept the principle of other professions selling their knowledge and services, then why not ours? We can certainly expect some problems involving unethical practice to arise. They always do in all professions. But to accept this as an argument against self-employment is tantamount to suggesting that we are ethically more suspect, morally more prone to corruption, and professionally less able to cope with these problems than other professions...the problem of unsatisfactory or unethical professional practice is not confined to private practice [34].

The hostility toward the free-lance librarians from their fellow

professionals arises out of jealously, misunderstanding, and feeling of infringement of territorial rights.

The high cost of maintaining an effective and efficient library staff and collection cannot be denied. The bill must be paid and free service preserved. Dodd states, it is not up to the free-lance librarian or the information broker, but library management, to set the policy regarding all fees [35]. In the case with other professions like law and medicine, the cost of materials, overhead, and expenses is passed along to the client. This will also be the case with the information broker. Currently, the cost of the public library falls squarely on the shoulders of the general tax payer and select foundations, but the cost could be shared by other sectors of the economy to ease the burden; however, the free-lance librarian, as a tax payer, should not be penalized for her agressiveness and independence. The problems of funding will not be eliminated by charging fees to select patrons of the public library [36]. Special services conducted by the librarian are a direct cost which can be passed to the patron. The innovative projects like INFORM take this concept to a logical application. Rather than attempting to build a fee structure for users, the pay-library was created thereby entering into direct competition with free-lance information workers and bringing money into the public library system; it is in the spirit of free enterprise, a boon to the client, and enhances the status of the information profession. This same model could be applied to academic and special libraries.

More and more commerical libraries and information services are being established to meet the demand of businessmen, academicians, and

a host of others who require timely information. Patrons are willing to pay for the services, even though at times the rates rise above their ability to pay. Until recently, information was not a product considered crucial to decision making. It is certain that there will be a continuing upward spiral of information costs. As more public libraries adopt the model of INFORM or RISE, the cost of specialized or tailored information packages may offer an affordable alternative for small businessmen and others on limited budgets, while broadening the library's economic base.

FOOTNOTES

1. James B. Dodd, "Information Brokers," Special Libraries 67(May-June, 1976): 244; Susan Klement, "Draft Proposal, A Graduate Course on Alternative in Librarianship," Canadian Library Journal 34(April, 1977):137-139.; and, Information Brokers/ Free-Lance Librarian--New Careers--New Library Services, Workshop, proceedings, Syracuse University University School of Information Studies(August 13, 1976) p. 1-4.

2. Professionalism is a complex issue which deserves a seperate essay. The discussion of this issue will be limited in this paper.

3. Ill-Mai Gerdels, "Apologia for Alternatives," Canadian Library Journal 34(April, 1977):92-93; Taylor, Robert, "Question-Negotiation and Information Seeking in Libraries," in Key Paper in Information Science, pp.54-55; and, Lemuel DeWeese, "Paradigm of Commitment, Toward Professional Idenity," Special Libraries 61(December 1970): 541-550.

4. Susan Klement, "Marketing Library-Related Expertise," Canadian Library Journal, 34(April, 1977):97-117; and, Maxine Davis, An Introduction to Information Brokers/Free-lance Librarians, pp.1-4. This information can be found in many sources, too many to list here. The two sources cited will provide a general overview.

5. Linda W. Corman, "A Library Alternative at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education," Canadian Library Journal 34(April, 1977), p. 85.

6. Herman H. Henkle, "Crerar's R.I.S. Explained," Library Journal 74 (January, 1949), p. 96.

7. Ibid., p. 95f.

8. Ibid., Information Brokers/Free-lance Librarian, p. A-9.

9. Carol Vantine. "Fee-Based Information Services within the Public Library," in Ibid., Information Brokers / Free-lance Librarian, p. 21; 26.

10. Nancy Kingman, "The Special Librarian/Fee-Based Service Interface, or There's No Such Thing As A Free Lunch," Special Libraries Association Contributed Papers Sessions, June, 1975, N.P.

11. Ibid., Corman, p. 79.

12. Ibid., p. 81.

13. Ibid., p. 83.

14. .....(removed).

15. Ibid., Information Brokers/Free-Lnace Librarians, Vantine, p. 21.

16. Ibid., p. 21.

17. Richard De Gennaro, "Pay Libraries & User Charges," Library Journal 100(February 15, 1975):365.

18. Ibid., DeWeese, pp. 546-547.

19. Ibid., p. 548.

20. "Information Brokers:Who, What, Why, How," Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science, 2(February, 1976):11.

21. Celeste Silvers, "FIND/SVP," in Alternative Careers in Information/Librarian Services, proceedings, Syracuse University School of Information Sudies (November, 1977) pp. 20-21.

22. Ibid., pp. 20-28.

23. Eugene Garfield, "Institute for Scientific Information," in Ibid., pp. 28-34.

24. A particial list can be found in, Ibid., Information Brokers/Free-Lance Librarians, pp. A/9-A/10, and, Ibid., Klement, "Marketing."

25. Ibid., DeWeese, p. 548. Ibid., Gerdels, p. 91.

26. Ibid., Klement, "Graduate Course," pp.131-134.

27. This information can be found throughout the texts cited above where it pertains.

28. Ibid., Susan Klement, "The Free-Lance Alternative; Turning Traditional Skills New Directions," Ibid., Information Brokers/ Freelance Librarians, p. 15; Christopher Samuels, "The Role of the Information Broker in Today's Business and Industry," Ibid., p. 39; Ibid., Vantine, p.24; Ibid., pp. 49-50; and Ibid., Altern-

ative Careers in Information. Silvers, p. 18.

29. Two examples are: Directory of Library Consultants ed. by John N. Berry, 111, 1969; and Kelly Warnken, The Directory of Fee-Based Information Services 1977,(Information Alternative, 1977). The author has not seen either of these publications.

30. Ibid., Klement, "Marketing," pp. 97-101.

31. Ibid., Information Brokers/Free-Lance Librarians, Vantine, p. 20, 22, 23-26; Ibid., Samuels, p. 35. This situation is reinfourced throughout the literature.

32. Ibid., Klement, p. 13-14.

33. Task 1: Defining Information Function, A Discussion Paper, (University of Pittsburgh November, 1978) p. 2.

34. Ibid., Gerdels, p. 93.

35. Ibid., Dodd, "Information Brokers," p. 245.

36. Ibid., p. 248.

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